

The Development of ELF-aware Classroom Materials

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Abstract

Because of the growing number of interactions in English between people from different linguacultures, English as a lingua franca (henceforth ELF) has become a widely investigated research area. Its heterogenous, flexible and variable nature demands for a shift in English language classroom practices. Although there has been an increase in researching ELF pedagogical implications, its practical applicability in classroom instruction, materials development, teacher education, assessment and testing is still largely unexplored and unclear. The present paper focuses on the impact of ELF on English language pedagogy with special attention paid to classroom materials evaluation and design. The author discusses some vital theoretical issues concerning ELF and their implications for teaching English in relation to changes in pedagogical goals and approaches. The main part of the paper constitutes a list of guidelines for the development of ELF-aware classroom activities. Finally, and most importantly, some examples of ELF-aware activities designed by the author are presented and discussed. The paper is intended for those EFL practitioners who wish to explore how to make use of ELF research findings in practice. It may be also of interest to materials writers and teacher educators.

Keywords: English as a lingua franca; classroom materials; ELF-aware pedagogy; English language teaching

Introduction

The English language has spread around the world like no other language before and it is the most popular medium of communication between people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Seidlhofer, 2011: 2). The widespread use of English and its current role as a lingua franca influence the English language itself on different linguistic levels and call for a change in the traditional language pedagogy which does not fulfil the needs of the majority of language learners any more. They must be prepared for using English for different purposes in various linguacultures. Their future

interlocutors are more likely to be non-native speakers of English who far outnumber native speakers nowadays.

Defining English as a lingua franca (ELF)

In the field of applied linguistics it has long been controversial and problematic to define English as a lingua franca. There are two types of definitions: one which excludes native English speakers (e.g. Firth 1996; House 1999) and the second view, adopted here, which accepts native speakers as part of communication. According to Seidlhofer (2011: 7) ELF should be viewed as

“any use of English among speakers of different languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option”.

It describes the situations in which at least one speaker uses English as a second language. It is however worth pointing out that native English speakers contribute far less than non-native speakers to the way in which ELF evolves because they are the minority of ELF interactions.

The early ELF research focused on identifying a set of common features of this specific use of English. ELF was viewed as an ‘emergent’ variety of language or a set of such varieties (Seidlhofer 2001) because there were some ‘observed regularities’ (Seidlhofer 2009: 240) on different linguistic levels, particularly with reference to lexicogrammar (Seidlhofer 2004), pronunciation (Jenkins 2000) and pragmatics (Firth 1996 as cited in Jenkins et al. 2011: 286, House 1999 as cited in Jenkins et al. 2011: 286). In the first decade of the 21st century there was more focus on the knowledge, strategies and skills of successful ELF users. As was observed by Seidlhofer ‘ELF users exploit the potential of the language’ as they focus ‘on the purpose of talk and on their interlocutors as people... absorbed in the ad hoc, situated negotiation of meaning’ (2009: 240).

More recently ELF has been characterised by its inherent hybridity, dynamism, fluidity, flexibility and a lack of specific norms to follow (Seidlhofer 2011: 110; Sifakis and Bayyurt 2015). According to Osimc-Teasdale (2018: 201) ‘variable use in ELF communication means the use of language forms and functions that are not in accordance with standard language or conventionalised NS use of English’. She also points out that although variability of use is an intrinsic feature of all languages, it is especially evident in ELF communication in which English is characterized by constant negotiation and co-construction of meaning to achieve mutual intelligibility. Thus, it cannot be regarded as a monolithic codifiable language variety.

The impact of ELF on the English language pedagogy

The nature of ELF demands a shift in English language pedagogy in the 21st century. The ELF variability calls for reviewing established concepts, such as the role of norms and standards (Osimk-Teasdale, 2018). The traditional approaches to English language teaching (henceforth ELT) prioritise conformity to Standard English which ignores adaptive variability of ELF communication. Thus, English language teachers' normative midset and treating a native speaker of English as a language model have been questioned.

Among key aspects of ELT that need a reconsideration are teaching materials, the language syllabus, approaches and methods, language assessment and the knowledge base of language teachers. It is, however, necessary to point out that establishing a monolithic teachable model, the same for all contexts is not the purpose of ELF research. It is rather suggested that teachers should become ELF-aware (Sifakis 2014, 2017) and reevaluate their current practices, considering learners' context and their changing needs. As Galloway (2018: 476) notices '[i]t is about increasing choice, not reducing it'.

ELF implications for coursebooks and classroom materials

ELF implications for coursebooks and classroom materials may be applied not only by English language teachers, but also syllabus writers and coursebook designers.

So far there have been some studies of various coursebooks and teaching materials (e.g. Siqueira and Matos 2019; Matsuda 2002; Syrbe and Rose 2016; Vettorel 2010, 2018; Vettorel and Lopriore, 2013; Takahashi, 2014; Siqueira, 2015; Yu, 2015) that show that the majority of teaching materials are still restricted to standard monolithic representations of English. They are based on British English and American English and there is a gap between how the English language is portrayed in the materials and how it actually functions as an international lingua franca.

A lack of appropriately designed ELF-aware teaching materials and activities has been stressed by ELF researchers (Seidlhofer 2011, Sifakis 2009). There have been some frameworks or suggestions proposed to help practitioners evaluate and design ELT materials for ELF contexts (e.g. Galloway 2018, Kiczkowiak 2020, Lopriore and Vettorel 2019, Vettorel 2018, Galloway and Rose 2015).

Based on the ELF research findings, the proposed frameworks and the ELF literature, I decided to create a list of guidelines for the development of ELF-aware classroom activities

Guidelines for the development of ELF-aware classroom activities

1. A vast repertoire of English varieties (e.g. Matsuda 2002, 2003, 2012; Jenkins 2006)

Students need to be exposed to a vast repertoire of English varieties, including outer or expanding circle ones (Matsuda 2002, 2012). Coursebooks and teaching materials cannot be based on British and/or American English and should refrain from treating non-native English speakers as incompetent English users. Matsuda (2003) points out that “the limited exposure to English varieties in the classroom may lead to confusion or resistance when students are confronted with different types of English users or uses outside of class.” Students’ awareness of different varieties will make them perceive all the varieties as equally important and will prepare them to function in multilingual communities.

2. Various cultures and intercultural issues (e.g. Matsuda 2003, 2012; Baker 2012; Lopriore and Vettorel 2019)

The plurality of linguacultures expressed through ELF should be promoted and included in teaching materials and activities. According to Baker (2012: 69), “the use of English as the global lingua franca highlights the need for an understanding of cultural contexts and communicative practices to successfully communicate across diverse cultures”. Therefore, it is not enough to foster awareness of this cultural diversity, but it is also necessary to increase intercultural awareness and develop intercultural skills. There should be also some reflection upon learners’ own culture included.

3. A shift from inner circle settings to plurilingual settings (e.g. Matsuda 2003)

Matsuda (2003) suggests that dialogues presenting the use of ELF in multilingual outer circle and expanding circle settings should be incorporated in teaching materials. So far the majority of interactions presented in reading or listening tasks take place in English speaking countries, mainly the UK or the USA. A more plurilingual approach would be adapted e.g. when listening to a conversation in Portugal between a tourist from Finland and another tourist from China.

4. A shift from the focus on ‘native-like’ pronunciation and grammatical correctness to intelligibility (e.g. Jenkins 2000, Kiczkowiak 2020)

Kiczkowiak (2020) stresses that intelligibility in ELF contexts is more important than native speaker proximity. Successful communication does not seem to be related to speaking with a standard native-like accent. He suggests that materials should not focus on standard British English or General American English. Too much attention is paid to pronunciation or grammatical correctness and in teaching there should be more prominence given to intelligibility issues.

5. Examples of successful ELF communication between speakers of different origins and first languages (e.g. Galloway 2018, Sifakis and Tsantila 2019, Kiczkowiak 2020)

Coursebook designers and materials writers should provide learners with examples of successful ELF communication between speakers of different origins and first languages to show that mutual intelligibility is the main aim of ELF. Galloway (2018: 476) stresses that exposure to authentic language will help students understand how the language is negotiated and raise their motivation and awareness that in order to communicate successfully, it is not necessary to adhere to ‘a strict set of native English speakers norms’. Kiczkowiak (2020) suggests that the English language presented in teaching materials cannot be based on ‘native speaker’ corpora. He proposes the use of the existing ELF corpora, such as VOICE (Vienna Oxford International Corpus of English), ELFA (English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Contexts), WrELFA (Written English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Contexts), or ACE (Asian Corpus of English) to showcase ‘the true diversity of the English language’.

6. Awareness raising activities (Matsuda 2003, Jenkins 2006, Kiczkowiak 2020)

Awareness raising activities should be included in teaching materials (Matsuda 2003, Jenkins 2006, Kiczkowiak 2020) in order to improve learners' knowledge of the diversity of English. This type of activities could develop learners' awareness of how they can use the language to communicate successfully and raise their confidence in their own varieties. Kiczkowiak (2020) notices that the topic of ELF, language change and variation, native speakerism and the diversity of the English language could easily be introduced in reading and listening texts.

7. Reflection on learners' experience with English (Vettorel in Matsuda 2017, Kiczkowiak 2020)

According to Kiczkowiak (2020) appropriate reflection activities can help learners re-examine how the English language is currently being used, by whom, and for what purposes. They will help learners to understand how pragmatic and lexicogrammatical patterns change in different contexts and how flexible English may be. Learners should also reflect on their changing language needs.

8. Communication strategies (Vettorel 2018)

Since ELF communication is dynamic and fluid in nature and is characterized by negotiation and co-construction of meaning, Vettorel (2018) points out that promoting practice of communication strategies, e.g. appeal for help (direct/indirect), meaning negotiation (e.g. requests for repetition, clarification, confirmation checks,

direct/indirect question), responses (e.g. repetition, rephrasing, expansion, confirmation), achievement strategies (e.g. paraphrase, word-coinage, code-switching) and raising awareness of them should play a vital role in ELT materials.

ELF-aware activities

Some examples of ELF-aware activities that I designed are presented below.

ELF-aware activity 1: The diversity of English

■ Aims:

- to raise students' awareness of the diversity of English and the spread of English,
- to expose students to various accents of English.

■ Procedures:

Warm-up questions: *Why is it important to speak English nowadays? Why do you think English is considered a global/world language? In your opinion, how many people speak English in the world? How many of them are native speakers of English?*

The students are presented with the facts concerning the numbers of native speakers, non-native speakers (e.g. Crystal 2003).

The teacher introduces the idea of Kachruvian (Kachru 1985) circles (Inner, Outer, Expanding circle countries).

The students are exposed to a list of countries and need to decide into which category they follow: Inner, Outer or Expanding circle countries.

Poland	Great Britain	the Philippines	Australia	France	Cameroon	the USA
Canada	Gambia	Jamaica	Russia	Nigeria	Singapore	Austria
India						

- Inner circle countries
- Outer circle countries
- Expanding circle countries

Answers:

Inner circle countries: Great Britain, the USA, Australia, Canada, Jamaica, Singapore, Nigeria

Outer circle countries: India, the Philippines, Cameroon, Gambia

Expanding circle countries: Poland, France, Austria, Russia

To check their answers, they watch the video on Youtube: ‘English a Global Language’:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2q4DAu0x-zU>

The students are asked more detailed questions concerning the video:

Why did English become a global language? In which domains is English the official language nowadays? How has the emergence of the United States of America as the world economic power in the 20th century influenced the status of English nowadays?

The students are supposed to compare the accents of English of people from the countries in the list with the use of the website **IDEA – International Dialects of English Archive** (<http://www.dialectsarchive.com>)

IDEA is an archive of recordings of dialects and accents of English from all around the world. It is possible to search these recordings by country, the speaker’s ethnicity, age and occupation. It is also possible to read the transcription of the recordings.

ELF-aware activity 2: Let’s talk about our cultures! – the international project

■ Aims:

- to expose learners to various accents of English,
- to expose learners to various cultures,
- to experience intercultural communication,
- to draw students’ attention to various communication strategies.

■ Preparation:

Before the lesson students are supposed to prepare a 10-minute presentation about their country (general information such as location, geography, cuisine, places worth visiting) addressed at an international audience.

The teacher finds a partner class from another country and organises an online meeting with them (such a project may be part of an internationally-oriented school partnership, for example through eTwinning or the “Nice to e-meet you” project.).

The teacher draws the students’ attention to various communication strategies that may be used during the conversation, e.g. paraphrasing, appeal for help, meaning negotiation.

Example:

Meaning negotiation strategies (e.g. requests for repetition, clarification)

Could you please repeat that for me again?

Would you mind going over that one more time?

Could you clarify what you meant by (X)?

Sorry to interrupt, could I get a little more clarification on (X)?

Sorry, I didn't quite catch that. Could you explain that to me one more time?

I don't think I understand what you meant. Would you mind repeating that?

■ Procedure:

After a short introduction made by the teacher, during the online meeting learners show their presentation to students from another country and then listen to their partners' presentation about their country.

After the presentation there is some time for discussion and the students ask and answer questions concerning their country and their partners' country.

*Thanks to this activity students may not only learn about other countries, but also they learn how to talk about their own culture and compare it with others.

■ After the lesson:

The teacher asks questions:

Can you see any similarities and differences concerning your countries? Did you have trouble understanding? Why did the troubles happen? How did you overcome the communication troubles? What communication strategies were used during the meeting? What did you learn from the interaction? What aspect is important for communication between people from different linguacultures?

*Such questions will definitely raise their awareness of what the interaction in English in multicultural environments really looks like.

*The lesson may be organised in a larger group with a few partners or repeated with other countries.

ELF-aware activity 3: The use of the VOICE corpus (Vienna Oxford International Corpus of English)

*VOICE is a corpus of spoken English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) containing naturally occurring, plurilingual data.

*This activity is short and may be easily used as a supplementary or homework activity.

■ Aims:

- to expose learners to various accents of English,
- to make them aware of variations in different Englishes,
- to raise their awareness of different communication strategies,

■ Task:

I pairs access the VOICE corpus online: <https://www.univie.ac.at/voice/>

Find an interesting conversation and try to decide on the following issues:

- Where does the situation take place?*
- Who are the speakers?*
- What communication strategies do the speakers use?*
- Are the speakers intelligible to others?*
- Do you find it easy to understand the conversation?*

*When analysing the task in class, the teacher should draw the students' attention to the fact that although there are some variations in different Englishes, mutual intelligibility is the most important in ELF communication.

Concluding remarks

On the whole, it seems clear that ELT materials designers and English language teachers should acknowledge the ELF research findings and implications. Galloway (2018) calls for 'more dialogue between ELF researchers, ELT practitioners and ELT materials writers and publishers'. The focus on accuracy and native English should be shifted towards a more realistic view of how the English language actually functions as an international lingua franca. Integrating a vast repertoire of tasks aimed at raising learners' awareness and respect for other English varieties and cultures will prepare them for real-life encounters outside the class.

ELF-aware activities are beneficial to learners in many ways. First and foremost, they are more adapted to the changing needs of learners. They make them realise that most of their interactions will take place with non-native English speakers, because they far outnumber native English speakers who are the minority of ELF interactions nowadays. They also show that the main aim of ELF interaction is mutual intelligibility and it is

more important than achieving ‘native-like’ fluency or grammatical correctness. They make them perceive all the varieties and cultures, including their own variety and culture, as equally important. They raise learners' confidence in their own varieties, making them abandon the desire to achieve an often-unattainable goal to sound native-like. In this way, they also raise their motivation to learn and use English and their self-confidence as ELF users.

ELF-aware pedagogy may be introduced not only by designing whole ELF-aware lesson plans, but also by implementing modifications and expansions to pre-existing coursebook activities or designing supplementary activities. The Internet resources (e.g. online archives, digital media, social networking sites, online blended learning, Skype) may provide valuable audio-visual materials for teachers who wish to engage their students in ELF-based activities. It seems especially useful and easy during the pandemic because while online teaching, there is easy access to Internet resources. They engage learners in real-life ELF communication with speakers from different linguacultures. Taking part in international projects (telecollaboration, school partnerships, eTwinning etc.) may promote the English language diversity and give students and teachers opportunities to communicate in international settings.

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